



Asian-American Members Unhappy With Coble Letter

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A trio of Asian-American lawmakers say they are not satisfied with Rep. Howard Coble's (R-N.C.) statement of regret regarding his recent comments concerning the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II.

On Friday, Reps. Mike Honda (D-Calif.), Robert Matsui (D-Calif.) and David Wu

(D-Ore.) wrote to Coble asking to meet with him about his statements on a radio program that he understood the decision to put Japanese-Americans in internment camps during the war.

Coble released a statement and also wrote back to the three lawmakers. "I regret that many Japanese and Arab Americans found my choice of words offensive because that was certainly not my intent," said Coble's letter.

Coble went on to say his point had been that "given the circumstances in which President [Franklin D.] Roosevelt found himself at the time and the information that was available to him, he made a decision that he felt was in the best interest of national security" but "we all now know that this was in fact the wrong decision and an action that should never be repeated."

In separate interviews Wednesday, Matsui and Honda, both of whom were interned as infants, said they were unhappy with the extent of Coble's apology and that they felt he still did not have a clear grasp of the issue.

"His letter really misses the point," said Honda. "He did not want to apologize; he regretted that his choice of words were offensive. What I was most concerned about was his grasp of the information."

Both Honda and Wu took issue with Coble's suggestion that Roosevelt made his decision based on national security concerns. They said that most recent scholarship on the issue has established that the decision was based on political concerns and war hysteria rather than legitimate security fears.

"Howard feels factually that Roosevelt was right," said Matsui. "It would have been nicer if he could have put in some kind of regret or apology" beyond what he did.

Matsui said that he spoke to Coble personally about the issue Tuesday night. "He basically said that he feels the matter was closed and that he did not think a meeting was necessary," Matsui said, adding that he considered Coble a friend and that the whole controversy "pains" him.

Honda said that he still hoped Coble might come around, and that some Republican lawmakers had approached the North Carolinian to try to broker an understanding. "We have some other colleagues from his side that are speaking with him also," said Honda, though he would not say whom.

Honda and Matsui would like to see Coble add his name to the list of co-sponsors of a resolution Honda dropped last week that would make Feb. 19 a "National Day of Remembrance" for Japanese-, German- and Italian-American internees.

A Coble spokeswoman said Wednesday she had not yet had a chance to discuss with her boss the possibility of co-sponsoring Honda's resolution.

This is not the first time Coble has spoken out on the subject of the internment camps.

In 1988, Congress passed and President Ronald Reagan signed a bill that officially apologized for the Japanese-American internments and provided reparations to camp survivors. Coble was one of the leading opponents of the bill in the House, voting against it both on the floor and in the Judiciary Committee, where it passed 28-6.

"I can argue that in a time of war when a country is threatened for its very survival, as this country was, many things happened and many lives were disrupted for many reasons," Coble said at the time.

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